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THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN THE CURRICULUM.

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"MORE THAN THE COMMON ELEMENT IN COMPOSITION AND LITERATURE," LANGUAGE IS A SUBJECT APPROPRIATE FOR STUDY IN THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM. HERETOFORE, THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION HAVE SUFFERED FROM TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' INADEQUATE KNOWLEDGE OF RECENT LANGUAGE DISCOVERIES, AND LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION HAS BEEN INCOMPLETE AND DISORDERLY. HOWEVER, SINCE 1960, SEVERAL CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS HAVE PROVIDED IMPETUS TO THE UNIQUE ROLE OF LANGUAGE. THE PORTLAND, OREGON STUDY TREATED THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE, ITS STRUCTURE, HISTORY, LEXICOGRAPHY, AND USAGE, AND AMERICAN REGIONAL ENGLISH AS DISTINCT UNITS ASSIGNED TO SPECIFIC YEARS FOR STUDY. SIMILAR CONTENT EMPHASIS UPON LANGUAGE WAS INCORPORATED INTO THE PRODUCTS OF THE NEBRASKA CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT CENTER. HOWEVER, ONLY THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA'S CENTER MADE LANGUAGE CENTRAL TO THE CURRICULUM IT DEVELOPED, RECOGNIZING LANGUAGE AS A DISCRETE ENTITY AND AS THE FOUNDATION FOR THE STUDY OF LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION. THIS CONCEPTION OF THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, AND COMPOSITION IS MORE ACCURATE THAN THE "SEPARATE AND EQUAL" RELATIONSHIP IMPLIED IN THE TRIVIUM CONCEPT. (THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "LANGUAGE, LINGUISTICS, AND SCHOOL PROGRAMS, PROCEEDINGS OF THE SPRING INSTITUTES, 1963." CHAMPAIGN, ILL., NCTE, 1963.) (RD)

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THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN THE CURRICULUM

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Not long ago I had occasion to visit a freshman English class which was using one of the sourcebooks that have become so popular. Taking off from one of the topics treated in the sourcebook, the young instructor spent the entire period in an authoritative disquisition on the United States Constitution in particular and constitutional law in general. This was interesting, if disturbing. The young man apparently had prepared his discourse with care, and the students listened with some show of attention. What was disturbing, of course, was the fact that the instructor was not an authority in political science and that the class was a class in a department of English.

I recall that several years ago a textbook used in first-year English tempted so many instructors to become amateur philosophers that the department of philosophy registered an official protest to the dean of the college, and attention to mass communication in another freshman course aroused the wrath of the head of the school of journalism, who also complained to the dean. Much longer ago, when I was teaching at Michigan, the use of *The New Republic* in freshman English classes stimulated such dogmatic political theorizing by the instructors that the department of political science officially protested to the administration.

Despite the growing use of the sourcebook, the standard collection of freshman readings is still popular and pervasive. It still exhibits its variety of topics ranging from campus orientation to religion, with liberal education and the pursuit of learning sandwiched between.

But the range to be found in freshman English is slight compared with that in the secondary schools. Professor J. N. Hook recently recalled that a professor some twenty-five years ago made a list of all the aims of English teaching that he could find anywhere in print. He discovered a total of 1,481. These aims ranged from "Improve character" through "Teach appreciation" to "Teach the evils of alcohol. . . ." Hook adds that if this listing were to be brought down to date it probably now would include several hundred additional items, including sex education.

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Defining the Curriculum

This making English the wastebasket of the total curriculum was a principal concern of the members of the Basic Issues Conferences

in 1958. Of the thirty-five issues which they arrived at, the very first one is simply this, "What is 'English'?" The report states, "We agree generally that English composition, language, and literature are within our province, but we are uncertain whether our boundaries should include world literature in translation, public speaking, journalism, listening, remedial reading, and general academic orientation." Then the report asks, "Has the fundamental liberal discipline of English been replaced, at some levels of schooling, by *ad hoc* training in how to write a letter, how to give a radio speech, manners, dating, telephoning, and vocational guidance?" Except for the implication that college teaching is free from this sort of thing, this is a very good question. As I have indicated, we are not so pure in college, either. And I might add that one of the freshman anthologies on my shelves has Dating as its first section and that another has a section on Choosing a Career.

More recently the new Commission on English of the College Entrance Examination Board addressed itself to this issue and produced the following definitive statement:

> The three central subjects of the English curriculum are language, literature, and composition. . . . The study of language should permeate all the work in English; specifically, it should include (a) spelling, (b) the enrichment of vocabulary, less through word-lists than through attention to the contexts of literature read and compositions written, (c) systematic study of word derivations and change in word meanings, (d) mastery of the forms of usage characteristic in the spoken and written discourse of educated people, (e) some competence in modern linguistic analysis through the study of modern English grammar. Such study should be both for use in speaking and writing and for the pleasure that comes from acquisition of knowledge.

The CEEB considers, then, that knowledge about the language is worth acquiring for its own sake.

Two distinguished speakers also have recently addressed themselves to this issue, "What is English?" That was the title of the speech made by Archibald MacLeish at the 1961 NCTE convention in Philadelphia. Although MacLeish discussed warmly the value of the teaching of literature, the subject itself he left as amorphous as he found it. It was also the title of the speech made by H. A. Gleason, professor of linguistics at Hartford Seminary, at the 1962 Chicago convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Gleason spoke more to the point. He insisted that English is a language, and that the basic subject of English is language.

Now the CEEB report and Gleason have something in common. They look in the same direction, but Gleason looks farther. The CEEB Commission accepts some English language content as valuable as an end in itself. Gleason would accept not only the whole range of English language content as valid subject matter for the nonspecialist but would also insist that the features of language itself, the basic principles of linguistic study, are the valid content of English.

I wish to return to Gleason later. First we might observe that the acceptance of the English language itself as valid content for English classes is not new. At the University of Michigan in 1925 Professor Charles C. Fries impressed me—and other summer session graduate students—with his declaration that the English language is a proper content for the freshman course. A month or so later I tried this out with George Philip Krapp's *Modern English: Its Growth and Present Use* as one of my two textbooks. Later I switched to Jespersen's *Growth and Structure of the English Language*. This experience, as a matter of fact, so convinced me of the value of Professor Fries's viewpoint that at an apparently most unpropitious time I read a paper at the St. Louis NCTE convention advocating that the English language be the basis of a really comprehensive freshman course which would include both speaking and writing. I say "unpropitious" because back there in 1938 the educational climate was not yet warm enough for this idea to germinate. It is true that the Minnesota Communication Program, established in 1945, increasingly incorporated English language as content in its first quarter's work, but this continuing experiment too was ahead of its time.

What has warmed the climate is precisely the work of such people as Gleason and his immediate predecessors in the field of linguistics. This work you have been hearing about and discussing this week, and I shall not bore you with reviewing the basic contributions of Bloomfield, Trager, Smith, Hill, Hockett, Fries, and now Chomsky, and the others who have made linguistics a new and exciting discipline. As Roberts and W. N. Francis, Donald Lloyd and James Sledd and Harold Whitehall and others have utilized the linguistic research in applications for teachers and teaching, new doors have been opened.

As recently as a decade ago such an institute as this could hardly have been planned, and, if planned, would surely not have drawn you here for a week. You have entered the new doors. This week you have considered language as content: its nature, its relation to the skill of reading, its relation to the theory of usage, the function of the dictionary, and the relationship between linguistics and composition.

New Programs

These very topics almost suggest the expansion of the topic I have this morning, the role of language in the curriculum. Perhaps you already here have outlined what the role can be, should be. I say "can be," for some long first steps have been taken in the direction of defining that role in these particular terms. One step was taken in Portland, Oregon, where a Ford Foundation cosponsored comprehensive citywide curriculum study three years ago led to the creation of several new curriculums in various fields. One is English. The initial investigation and inventory came up with the recommendation that in a new English curriculum the English language be included as content to be studied as a liberal subject in its own right. The following summer, 1961, Professor W. N. Francis went to Portland to lead an intensive materials-construction project involving both visiting specialists and a large number of Portland teachers. The resulting curriculum was put into the classroom last year. I expect to spend several days there in a couple of weeks to see how it actually is faring in the classroom and with the teachers. From what I have heard informally, I believe it is doing very well.

This is the language content in the four-year senior high school Portland sequence: the nature of language, the structure of the English language, the history of the English language, English lexicography, usage, and American regional English. These topic areas are treated, I think, as distinct units suitable for assignment to certain years in the sequence. The unit on structure, for instance, is placed in the ninth grade. Once having completed such a unit in a given grade, the student has presumably learned as much of that particular subject area as he can or should get in secondary school.

Another step was taken three years ago when the Nebraska Council of Teachers of English formed a committee, which, at the request of the state department of education and with the support of a grant from a private foundation, produced a state curriculum guide that included the English language as content in the high school years, with similar attention to structure, history, and usage.

The Nebraska material is being incorporated in large measure in the larger study now being undertaken at the University of Nebraska through a grant from the United States Office of Education. This grant last spring established there one of six curriculum development centers in the country. As I think you know, the general plan for these centers has been denominated "Project English." No two centers have the same objectives, except that all are concerned with

improving the English school curriculum. Several, like that at Nebraska and those at the University of Oregon and at Hunter College, deal with language as related somehow to the immediate focus of attention, but only one, that at the University of Minnesota, puts it at the center of the focus. Because of this I'd like to read something from our original application to the United State Office of Education. Part of this is extremely familiar to you, I realize; but I think you might like to see the basis upon which our own five-year project has been established. It is most relevant to my topic today and to your presence at this institute this week. It is so relevant, indeed, that if I were to expand it, it could well be my paper this morning. I am going to read the equivalent of about two pages of this application, from the opening section entitled The Problem.

> Linguistic scholars have developed an extensive body of knowledge (information and concepts) about language, and a quantity of reliable information is available to the mature student of language. Little of this body of knowledge has penetrated the secondary school curriculum, however. Few colleges require or even offer a systematic course for prospective teachers in the nature and structure of the English language. Information long known to linguists has had little influence on attitudes and instructional techniques of teachers. At present only two texts specifically devoted to the structure of English are available for use in high schools. Even these do not provide the unsophisticated teacher with the background for a systematic approach to instruction in language, nor do these two sources provide a sequential program of instruction for secondary school students. Information about language known to psychologists, philosophers, and anthropologists has had even less impact on the high school curriculum.
>
> To be sure, official recognition of some aspects of this problem has recently occurred. . . . [The report then refers briefly to the recognition by the Commission on English and by the Portland survey.]
>
> Characteristically, then, present instruction about language is incomplete and disorderly, with the result that reliable knowledge about language is not widely shared. Secondary school students receive "bits and pieces" of knowledge which do not provide a reasonably complete view of the nature of language and the ways in which language functions. High school students may know some concepts about standard usage or prescriptive grammer; typically they know little about the insight brought to the study of language by descriptive linguists and nothing about its extensions through transformational grammar, or about the systematic structures which characterize language. They may have some notions about the way in which language is adapted to its end in acts of exposition and persuasion, but they lack any systematic study of rhetoric, or of the theory of expository or persuasive address. They may have some ideas about critical thinking, or about the scientific method as reflected in discourse of all kinds, or even be able

to identify some of the commonplace linguistic fallacies. But they are unlikely to have had any systematic instruction in logic, even though the bits and pieces about critical thinking and fallacies tend to be derivations of the study of logic. They are likely to have little or no understanding of the relationship between the development of speech and the nature of man, or between language and culture.

If systematic knowledge of the language is unavailable to secondary school students, it is equally unavailable to college students and almost nonexistent for students in elementary schools. Specialization of language study has fragmented the systematic study of discourse provided in classical education through the trivium of grammar, logic or dialectic, and rhetoric. The knowledge about language in the last half century has been developed through the work of many disciplines, with students of linguistics, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, speech, psycholinguistics, and literature all contributing to the expansion of knowledge. The specialization of the study of language and literature which has occurred in higher education has brought the familiar problem that such knowledge is not readily available in any synthesized form to college students. The reciprocal effect on the secondary school curriculum has been that even the best prospective teachers of English and speech often bring to their teaching a narrow and highly specialized view of the nature of language. The "bits and pieces" of knowledge represented in their own specialized studies are reflected in the "bits and pieces" of instruction about language in the secondary classroom.

To replace the disordered and fragmented instruction about language, instruction in the skills of speaking, reading, writing, and listening should proceed *within the context of instruction about language.* It has been too long assumed that students need "know" only those prescriptions immediately applicable to classroom exercises in the communication skills. The result has been that students have come to know little about language, and much of allegedly "known" does not represent any real understanding of the nature of language. It is probable that lack of attention to systematic instruction in language has frustrated the development of communication skills. For example, the student who sees the development of new habits of of usage as the search for control over a new "dialect" is quite likely to make better progress than one who is told that the dialect which serves his family and community is wrong, and that he must now learn to speak and write "correctly."

With the body of information and concepts about language now available, it seems quite clear that a team of dedicated scholars representing diverse academic disciplines and sound pedagogy can establish the relevant frames of reference within which the informational and conceptual learning about language could proceed in an orderly way. Such frames of reference are: (a) nature of language (as viewed by the psychologist); (b) structure of language (as viewed by the linguist); (c) the history of language; (d) the problems of meaning, reference, and proof; (e) major forms within which utterance takes place (literature and its genres, persuasive

and expository discourse and its genres); and (f) media influences on form and function. Relevant concepts developed in the field of psycholinguistics and encompassing concepts from both (a) and (b) will be included.

You will have noted that in our thinking at Minnesota we went on from the position advocated by the CEEB Commission on English to a position which we were happy to find eloquently supported by Professor Gleason in his subsequent Chicago address.

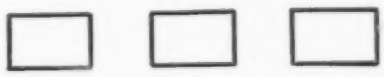
I suppose that very informally our thinking could be outlined as something like this. If we take into account all the various activities that are subsumed under the rubric "language arts," we find that this term "English language arts" is really not inapropos. The youngster learning how to conduct a telephone conversation, or to write a business letter, or to talk in a group discussion is learning how to choose and manipulate language appropriate to a situation.

Language as the Focus

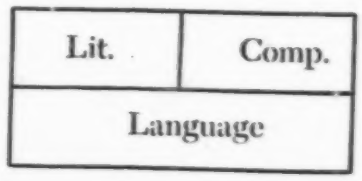
The common thread, the central fact, is concern with language, with the English language in particular. In the school, however, this concern is typically manifested in terms of attention to a specific overt act—a given assignment, exercise, or drill, and not in terms of the language knowledge presumably at the basis of the overt act. Neither the student nor the teacher is supposed to know anything about why the language operates in different ways or how it operates.

Now let's go on from the broad area of language arts to look at the frequently proposed triad of language, literature, and composition. We see that in the usual proposal or statement there is nothing to indicate that we have anything but a tripartite grouping of three discrete subjects. Yet only a little consideration should impel our recognition that, on the contrary, these three have quite a different relationship. We do not have three discrete and co-ordinate entities like faith, hope, and charity.

True, at first glance the technical writing student trying to explain in 600 words how an electric battery is constructed may appear to have little in common with the student trying to understand Chaucer's Prologue. But each one is dealing with problems in the use of language, problems of syntax and problems of vocabulary. Instead of a triad of equal but disparate entities, which might be represented like this,



we actually have a relationship better diagramed like this:



in which the language, while retaining its own discreteness, is also the foundation upon which study of composition and literature rests.

The fact of the relationship is not obscured, but rather is thrown into conspicuous high-relief, by two unhappy circumstances. One is that in practice the modicum of language information found in the teaching of composition has been both inadequate and unsound. Composition teaching has suffered because of this. The other is that except for attention to archaic English as in the study of Chaucer or Shakespeare language information drawn from modern linguistics has not been generally used in the study of literature. And literature teaching has suffered because of this.

Professor W. N. Francis said recently, "The task of literary interpretation and explication may be much aided by grammatical analysis. To work out the syntax of a difficult passage of prose or verse will not automatically remove its obscurity, but it will clearly define the boundaries within which interpretation must contain itself. Yet," Francis continued, "it is interesting to note that we can hardly ever use this tool with the average student—or with the average English teacher, for that matter. He simply does not know enough grammar. A knowledge of a sensible and realistic syntax of English on both sides—the teacher's and the student's—would be immensely helpful. . . . Yet, as a regular reader of *The Explicator,* I can't remember a single article in that excellent little journal that makes use of syntactic analysis in the explication of a hard poem. Structural linguistics can supply us with a syntactic system for English—with several alternative systems, in fact—but it is up to us to make use of them. In order to do so," Francis concluded, "we must first learn them ourselves and then teach them to our students."

But, we agreed, language is more than the common element in composition and literature. It is itself a subject for our attention and our study. It can provide the foundation for the teaching of writing; it can be the base for the initial approach to a literary document; and in its rich complexity it can be—and we feel should be—substantive and central content in the English curriculum.

Here I should like to go back to Professor Gleason's address at the CCCC spring meeting in Chicago. In his own discussion of a language-centered curriculum he said that there should be three points of emphasis: the understanding of language, the manipulation of language, and the appreciation of language. "These," he said, "might easily be taken merely as new terms for the familiar trichotomy. But I select these terms because I think the implications are somewhat different. While each of them seems to center in one of the existing subdivisions, they all overlap in some measure all the present headings. They symbolize something of a closer drawing together of the components of the curriculum."

Now if we accept the position that language—with English as its particular form—is our basic content, we face finally the problem of where and how to incorporate it.

Undoubtedly the first attention to language as content should occur in the elementary school. It happens that our Minnesota project is limited to the junior-senior high school range, so that naturally we must begin with the seventh grade and try to construct and test a sequential English curriculum with language as its central content. This is our job for the next four years.

There are implications of such a curriculum. Not only does it call for materials; it also calls for teachers. Inservice experience and summer institutes and workshops will be needed. The teachers of tomorrow must be given better training. We must follow the lead of Ohio and New York and the other states that recently have raised certification standards for teaching English.

I insist that the future for English teaching is a professional future. It is a future toward which we must work as a professional group if we are to fulfill our whole responsibility to the boys and girls we teach.

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